

Human Rights Council 19th session

Reinvigorating the momentum

This is a joint statement by 9 NGOs, including Amnesty International, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia), Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Civicus, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH), Human Rights House Foundation, International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), International Service for Human Rights (ISHR).

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Madame President,

We are encouraged that the Council has renewed the stalling momentum we have noted after the last session in September 2011. We wish to comment on five elements that will continue to influence this body's work:

- 1. Reprisals, threats and intimidation against those who contribute to the work of the Council and its mechanisms must stop now. Today, the Minister of Public Coordination and Public Affairs of Sri Lanka has reportedly threatened to QUOTE 'break the limbs in public' END QUOTE of persons who have provided the Council with information about Sri Lanka. We welcome the expressions of concern about reprisals by the Council Bureau and Presidency and by States in this room, and the High Commissioner elsewhere this morning. We underline the responsibility of all States to contribute practically to the protection of human rights defenders everywhere, including against intimidation and reprisals, and urge concerned delegations to be attentive to the protection of human rights defenders, including through their diplomatic missions around the world. Decisive action by the Council to call to account governments that engage in intimidation and reprisals is overdue, and the panel in September provides an opportunity to decide so.**
- 2. The Council must continue to address situations of human rights violations, including by adopting country resolutions. It must not be swayed by the anachronistic and misleading argument, which claims that speaking out about human rights abuses undermines the sovereignty of States. In that regard, we are heartened by the resolution promoting accountability and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. We also welcome the first-ever consensual adoption of the resolution on the DPRK. However, we encourage States to be careful to not let the need to find cooperative approaches remove the critical edge from the Council's work. We are also concerned that not all democratic movements striving for peaceful change – such as in Bahrain and Egypt – have received the Council's support, and hope this gap will be filled shortly.**
- 3. We welcome the Council's first panel discussion on ending human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity. We are disappointed that some States deliberately chose to walk out, and would remind them of their obligation under GA Resolution 60/251 to cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms. When violations including systemic torture, killings and rape have been consistently brought to this Council's attention, turning**

one's back on the discussion reflects more on the States which are refusing to engage than on the issues under consideration, and only reinforces the need for more discussion, not less. **The panellists affirmed the need for a mechanism to better address these issues, and we look forward to working with the Council to ensure its continued attention.**

4. **GA Resolution 60/251 provides for 'the most effective contribution' of NGOs and other stakeholders. At a minimum, this must involve adequate space to participate effectively in all debates. Six years into the Council's mandate, this should be beyond dispute. We are therefore concerned at continuing attempts by some States to restrict NGO participation. That said, we're grateful for the principled stance the Council took this morning to ensure that relevant stakeholders can participate in the Council, including its subsidiary mechanisms.** We also appreciate the efforts of the Presidency and OHCHR's civil-society section for their efforts to improve participation of NGOs, such as through remote participation. In this regard, we are also pleased with improvements that have been made to the Council website and to the Extranet site. The timely posting of the texts of oral interventions and webcast archives are among the welcome developments.
5. **And finally, this session has seen a number of cross-regional and fairly innovative discussions and statements. This includes the panel debate on freedom of expression and the Internet with its refreshing levels of interaction, the cross regional statements on R2P and human rights, and on Eritrea, and several broadly-led resolutions supporting the role of human rights defenders in peaceful protest or democracy and the rule of law. We encourage all States to continue to think outside the box and find new ways of contributing to better respect of all human rights for all.**

We thank you.